

CIRCLE ANNUAL REPORT 2012-2013

Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning & Engagement, Tisch College



CIRCLE SUPPORT PROVIDED BY TYPE*



CIRCLE BY THE NUMBERS: AUGUST 2012–SEPTEMBER 2013

299

Number of articles and broadcasts referencing CIRCLE. This includes coverage in *The New York Times*, NPR, *Washington Post*, *USA Today*, Politifact, *The Root*, *The Wall Street Journal*, CSPAN, MSNBC, PBS Newshour, NBC Latino, and *Education Week*

101

Number of individual organizations that received technical assistance and research support from CIRCLE

*Includes multiple types of requests from the same organization

About CIRCLE

CIRCLE, the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning & Engagement, focuses on the political life of young people in the United States, especially those who are marginalized or disadvantaged. CIRCLE’s scholarly research informs policy and practice for healthier youth development and a better democracy.

Reliable, Independent, and Timely Research

Research is essential for developing informed solutions. CIRCLE’s research plays a key role in understanding the civic engagement—and *disengagement*—of youth across the country. The leading source of authoritative research on the civic and political engagement of young Americans, CIRCLE works nationally with youth-serving organizations to help them understand and assess the impact of their programming.

Understanding Young People as Civic Agents

CIRCLE changes public discourse about young people as citizens, showing that youth opinions and actions are important and valuable to democracy. CIRCLE’s research points to the critical gaps that exist between youth from different socioeconomic backgrounds and CIRCLE has worked to identify ways of closing those gaps.

Campus Leadership

CIRCLE is based at Tufts University’s Jonathan M. Tisch College of Citizenship and Public Service. A national leader in university civic education, Tisch College infuses active citizenship throughout the university, preparing all students to have a positive impact through their personal and professional lives.

As part of the Tufts academic community, CIRCLE supports and conducts research within Tisch College and across the university. Examining the Tufts student population, CIRCLE collaborates on a unique longitudinal study on the impact of Tisch College’s work and has explored topics

such as the connection between civic engagement and psychosocial well-being. In the past year, CIRCLE has been involved in developing and evaluating Civic Seed, an innovative new online game that Tisch College is developing to prepare Tufts students to conduct responsible community engagement.

National Leadership

CIRCLE is active in national networks and conversations to strengthen the civic mission of K-12 schools, community organizations, and higher education. Within the past year, CIRCLE has participated in over two dozen panel talks and discussion forums on these topics.

CIRCLE is also a founding member of the National Action Civics Collaborative (NACC), an organization committed to supporting “action civics”—curricula and programs that involve a strong component of student action on issues of their choice.

Looking Ahead: Supporting Practice

CIRCLE strives to increase the breadth, diversity, and impact of work with practitioners.

Every day, CIRCLE provides tailored assistance to educators, leaders, and policymakers. This collaboration encourages the use of data in the field and helps CIRCLE understand trends in practice.

“You were perfect in introducing us to the subject of civic engagement and, in tone, style, and content, you set the stage for a very rich three-day experience. You placed the terms deliberation, collaboration, and civic relationships in the context of civic engagement and these concepts took root and found their way into many subsequent discussions...”

— Larry Rosen, Senior Advisor to the President, YMCA of the USA

33

Number of youth practitioner organizations served by CIRCLE, August 2012–September 2013



BEFORE THE YOUTHBUILD PROGRAM, ONLY 30% OF PARTICIPANTS SAID THEY EXPECTED TO LIVE PAST 65. AFTER THE PROGRAM, THAT NUMBER ROSE TO 90%.



“Thank you very much for spending time with us today... It’s amazing how one conversation could provide so much insight into the programs that surround us every day.”

— Susan Yuen, The Junior State of America

Source: Godsay, S., Kawashima-Ginsberg, K., Henderson, W., Levine, P. (2012) Pathways into Leadership: A Study of YouthBuild Graduates. (CIRCLE Special Report). Retrieved from the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning & Engagement (CIRCLE) website: <http://www.civicyouth.org/released-today-at-the-white-house-circle-study-shows-youthbuild-builds-leaders/>

Strengthening Civic Practice

Organizations need reliable data to design effective, sustainable programs. CIRCLE's experts help youth-serving organizations build their capacity, develop research methods, collect data, and understand the results.

The Impact of Building Leaders

For a study released at the White House in August 2012, CIRCLE evaluated YouthBuild USA, an organization that engages low-income youth, almost all of whom have dropped out of high school, in rebuilding their communities and their lives. YouthBuild incorporates strong civic and democratic education. Funded by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation and conducted with a team of YouthBuild alumni, CIRCLE's research found that YouthBuild's programming supports youth in overcoming disadvantages and challenges to become leaders in their careers and communities.

Informing K-12 Civic Education

Recognizing that social studies provides important opportunities for civic learning, all states have enacted standards to define and regulate these curricula. However, in a study funded by the Spencer Foundation and the S.D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation, CIRCLE found existing standards do not enhance students' learning. Informed by CIRCLE's research, in 2013, the National Council for the Social Studies released *C3: College, Career, and Civic Life*, a new framework to strengthen social studies standards. Used by Kentucky and Maryland, this framework has the potential to expand teacher development, appropriate assessments, and the use of high-quality materials.

CIRCLE also improves measures of democratic school climate. In 2013, CIRCLE worked with Democracy Schools, an initiative of the Robert R. McCormick Foundation and part of the national Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools, to evaluate participating high schools in Illinois.

Evaluating Innovative Solutions

Working with iCivics, an online civic education platform founded by Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, CIRCLE fielded a randomized experiment in three Florida counties. The study, funded in late 2012 by the Next Generation Learning Challenges, evaluated iCivics' online, interactive "Drafting Board" module, which helps students develop the civic skill of writing persuasive essays on public topics. CIRCLE found that students who used the model developed stronger writing skills than those who did not.

Influencing Practice in Higher Education

As the research department and internal evaluator for Tisch College, CIRCLE has participated in several studies to understand the impact of civic education at the university level. Tisch College is one of the few higher education institutions that has undertaken a longitudinal study to evaluate the impact of its programming. Additionally, with funding from Bringing Theory to Practice, CIRCLE conducted a multi-year study to understand the relationship between students' civic engagement and aspects of their well-being, such as thriving, purpose, and persistence.

Looking Ahead: Developing New Measures and Assessments

CIRCLE is striving to develop and implement better measures, taking advantage of advanced technologies to assess skills, networks, and quality of impact.

The main measures of civic knowledge and engagement in use today are multiple-choice tests or surveys. These measures do not assess real skills, interactions with other people, or effects on communities. Better measures would support better policies and practices.

With support from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, CIRCLE is helping Generation Citizen develop an innovative e-portfolio system to assess participating students' growth and build a supportive online learning community. Generation Citizen offers a curriculum, coaching, and assistance to support action civics in the classroom.

CIRCLE is also helping Indiana Humanities assess the strength of civic infrastructure provided by humanities organizations in that state. In this innovative project, CIRCLE is looking at a civic network as a whole rather than at the competencies of a single organization or individual.

Identifying Gaps and Making Connections

Working with practitioners and policy advocates, CIRCLE regularly evaluates barriers and opportunities for increasing engagement and seeks to fill critical knowledge gaps.

Increasing Political Engagement

CIRCLE's research shows that during the 2012 presidential race many young people were unsure of the laws in their own state, and state education policies did not sufficiently prepare young people for voting. Additionally, college-bound youth were much more likely to engage than young people from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Building on these findings, CIRCLE launched the Commission on Youth Voting and Civic Knowledge to better understand ways to boost the civic knowledge and political participation of young Americans. Supported by the S.D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation, the W.T. Grant Foundation, the McCormick Foundation, the Spencer Foundation, and the Youth Engagement Fund, the Commission made strong recommendations for policy makers, advocates, and families to improve civic education.

During the 2012 election, CIRCLE also evaluated several projects that sought to inform voters through satirical videos, citizen deliberations, or media interventions. Supported by the Democracy Fund, CIRCLE found many of these interventions simply reinforced voters' existing political views. However, discussions among citizens and efforts to support journalists showed promise as strategies to effectively inform voters.

Additionally, CIRCLE's National Study of Learning, Voting and Engagement (NSLVE) will provide actionable information to those looking to engage youth on college campuses. Supported by the Foundation for Civic Leadership, NSLVE is the first national, comprehensive study that allows campuses to evaluate their voter turnout and registration rates.

Increasing Equity

Equal participation is at the heart of a healthy democracy. CIRCLE aims to address entrenched inequality in civic participation by identifying participation gaps, conducting research to understand those gaps, and collaborating with non-profit organizations to fill those gaps.

Nearly half of all young people (42 percent) have no college experience. "That's Not Democracy," CIRCLE's August 2012 study supported by the Kettering Foundation, showed a startling lack of civic opportunity

for these young people. Overwhelmingly likely to come from poor or working-class households, these youth are twice as likely as their peers to be disengaged from civic and political life and to lack the skills, opportunity, and sense of agency needed to improve their communities. Building on this research, CIRCLE is working closely with youth-serving programs across the nation to identify strategies for effective engagement.

Girls and young women are also less likely to have opportunities to build the skills and experience needed for political leadership. CIRCLE's research on this topic has led to a series of dialogues and was featured at the May 2013 White House Conference on Girls' Leadership and Civic Education.

Looking Ahead: Reducing Participation Gaps

CIRCLE focuses on the deep and persistent gaps in civic engagement by race, ethnicity, gender, and social class. CIRCLE will strive to understand what educators, organizations, and policymakers can do to help young people build the basic foundations necessary for becoming civically engaged.

For instance, CIRCLE's YouthBuild study and CIRCLE's report on non-college youth indicated the importance of skills, attitudes, and other assets that youth may need to acquire *prior* to civic participation. Understanding those preconditions may help researchers and practitioners alike find effective strategies for reducing participation gaps and engaging more young people.

“Civic education ‘is essential if we are to continue as a free democratic society.’”
— Teacher, surveyed for Commission on Youth Voting and Civic Knowledge



**RECOMMENDATIONS FROM CIRCLE'S COMMISSION
ON YOUTH VOTING AND CIVIC KNOWLEDGE INCLUDED:**

- Lower the voting age to 17 in local elections so that students can vote while taking a civics class.
- Make voting more accessible through same-day, online, and mobile registration.
- Support the discussion of controversial issues in schools, with accompanying teacher professional development.
- Implement multiplayer role-playing video games as tools for civic education.

2.3 Million

**NUMBER OF STUDENTS ON 258 COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES IN THE
INITIAL PHASE OF NSLVE, THE COLLEGE STUDENT VOTING STUDY**

\$1.1 Million

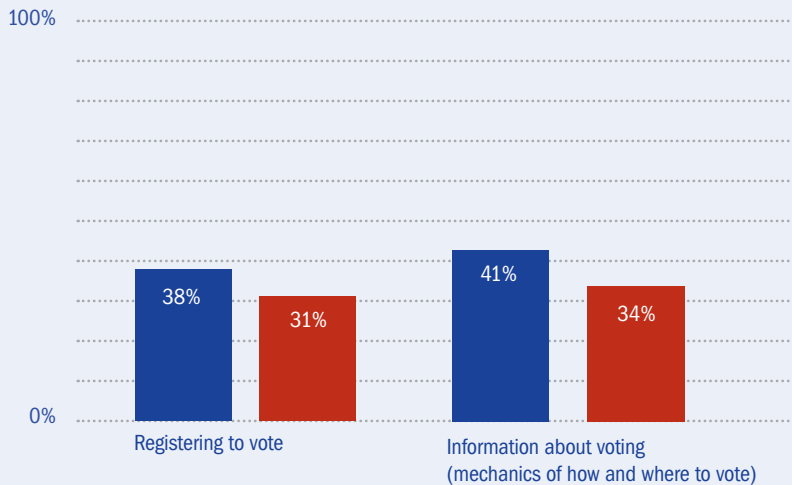
AMOUNT OF EXTERNAL GRANT FUNDING CIRCLE RECEIVED IN FY13

132,809

Number of unique visitors to the CIRCLE website from August 2012–September 2013



AGREE THAT SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES ARE SOMEWHAT OR VERY IMPORTANT:



Source: CIRCLE October 2012 pre-election youth poll

Over a third of youth are using social media or the Internet to seek out political information online. These resources show potential for closing gaps in participation among marginalized youth.

- Youth *without* college experience
- Youth *with* college experience

Harnessing Technology and New Media for Civic Learning

In an increasingly technology-saturated world, young people have opportunities to leverage new skills and knowledge to address complex social problems. CIRCLE is at the forefront of this change, exploring how technology and new media affect civic education and action.

Digital Learning and Assessment

CIRCLE is exploring the emerging landscape of alternative assessments—such as digital badges, e-portfolios, rubrics, and games—with an eye toward how such tools might influence civic education. In a working paper, CIRCLE explored the debate over digital badges and alternative assessments. While more research is needed, CIRCLE is looking to develop new metrics for mixed-methods assessment systems that include standardized tests, essays, demonstrations of skills, interactive games, and simulations.

Social Networks and Political Engagement

As online social networks continue to grow and change, there is an increasing need to understand how these spaces influence youth political knowledge and engagement. With support from the Youth Engagement Fund, CIRCLE polled the same sample of youth twice during the 2012 presidential election, asking detailed questions about their interaction with political information through social media.

“We were struck by how useful this survey will be, not only for us but for the sector of investigative journalism. There are precious few empirical studies on media in the digital age. You are making a great contribution to the field. And we anticipate you will strengthen our work, for which we are grateful.”

— Robin Heller, Chief Development Officer
Center for Public Integrity

Social media appears to be of particular importance for youth with no college experience, who are more likely to use social networking sites as a source of information about voting and voter registration. Since significant registration and turnout gaps exist between youth with and without college experience, this may be an indication that investing in online and mobile sources of political information and engagement can help close opportunity gaps.

Looking Ahead: Technology-Enabled Civic Learning

CIRCLE will study and help to develop digital and online tools that educate and engage young people.

CIRCLE is playing a leading role in evaluating a promising new online multiplayer game, Civic Seed. Developed by Tisch College, Civic Seed aims to teach community engagement skills to college students. The game guides students to “look inward” to consider their own motives, values, and identities; and “look outward” at the assets and characteristics of the communities where they work. Students also work together and “look forward” toward next steps. Completing the game generates an online certificate indicating that students are prepared for community work. CIRCLE’s evaluation of Civic Seed’s impact on students is supported by the Bringing Theory to Practice program.

CIRCLE has also begun to investigate massive open online course (MOOC) learning opportunities, digital badges, and alternative assessments. As these new spaces emerge and grow, CIRCLE is looking to understand their impact on individual agency and voice, civic motivations, and critical analysis of civic problems.

Civic Engagement and the Economy

Not only is civic engagement critical to democracy, but mounting evidence indicates that it's important to healthy economies as well.

CIRCLE's research shows that communities with higher levels of civic health suffered less from unemployment between 2006 and 2010, even when factoring in other possible explanations. Partnering with the National Conference on Citizenship, and supported by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, CIRCLE and University of Wisconsin professor Chaeyoon Lim investigated this connection in 50 states, 942 metro areas, and more than 3,100 counties. The analysis, released in September 2012, indicates that economic benefits may be driven by the role of nonprofit organizations and the effects of social cohesion—the degree to which residents socialize, communicate, and collaborate.

Looking Ahead: Civic Skills are Workforce Skills

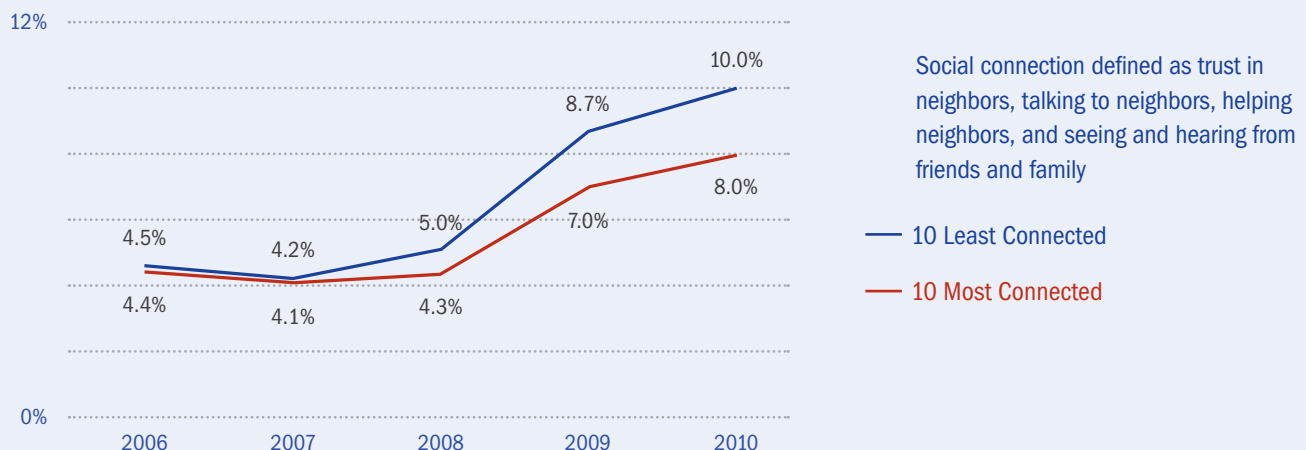
CIRCLE will investigate links between civic learning and workforce success to strengthen the case for civic education and help civic programs maximize their economic benefits.

The skills that make people good citizens also make them better on the job. Civic skills include the ability to discuss difficult issues, collaborate with diverse groups, communicate effectively, and address complex situations—all skills employers seek, as well. CIRCLE looks to better understand these connections and develop research-based strategies for educating citizens who will also be equipped to excel in the workforce.

“If I had a magic wand, I would take this report, tonight, and send out couriers to read it aloud to every mayor in America, aloud for emphasis. Because if I am a mayor, and I am looking at this, I'm thinking: OK, this actually is going to help my community strengthen.”

— Wendy Spencer, CEO of the Corporation for National and Community Service

UNEMPLOYMENT RATE 2006–2010 FOR MOST AND LEAST CONNECTED STATES



Source: National Conference on Citizenship. Civic Health and Unemployment II: The Case Builds, Washington DC. September 2012.



THE FOLLOWING FOUNDATIONS HAVE PROVIDED DIRECT GRANTS TO CIRCLE SINCE JUNE 2012:

- S. D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation
- Bringing Theory to Practice
- The Chicago Community Trust
- Democracy Fund
- Foundation for Civic Leadership
- William T. Grant Foundation
- Kettering Foundation
- Robert R. McCormick Foundation
- Spencer Foundation
- Youth Engagement Fund (Tides Foundation)

In addition, CIRCLE conducted contract work for organizations such as the Close Up Foundation, iCivics, Indiana Humanities, and the National Conference on Citizenship and its state partners. Some funds for these projects came originally from foundations or consortia such as the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, Next Generation Learning Challenges, and Carnegie Corporation of New York.

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